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## **Developing the use of communication rich pedagogies in classrooms using Video Enhanced Reflective Practice informed methodologies as a vehicle for teacher and speech and language therapist continuing professional development.**

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*Many studies show that nationally there are an ever increasing number of children with speech, language and communication needs. Few teachers begin their careers with pre-qualification training about how best to support these children in their classrooms. In this article we explore how the new teacher continuing professional development (CPD) standards produced by the Department for Education in England can be used as a lever to support teacher development of the use of communication rich pedagogies through the method of video enhanced reflective practice (VERP) and teacher coaching.*

### **SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS**

A wealth of studies and reports show that many children in England experience speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The tools available to identify children with language needs are problematic and inconsistently used. Additionally, there are few commonly agreed evidence based methods of support for teachers and practitioners to use in schools and early years settings. In 2017 The Communication Trust identified that SLCN is not part of initial teacher or early years practitioner pre-qualification training in a national survey into professional development of the children's workforce.

The Bercow Review (2008) reported an incidence of approximately 50% of children and young people in some socio-economically disadvantaged populations having speech and language skills significantly lower than children of the same age. An additional 3% of children had SLCN as part of a wider developmental difficulty, such as learning disability and autism spectrum disorder, and 7% of children have a language processing difficulty called Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). DLD has no identifiable cause and is persistent in nature, requiring support from Speech and Language Therapists and classroom adaptations to enable access to learning and the ability to form social relationships.

Schleider (2016) reported that teachers lack confidence when identifying and working with children with special educational needs and children who are new to English. Pressures on primary teachers are heightened as they are currently grappling with a new National Curriculum which places greater expectations on younger children to achieve in the core curriculum areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Children who have difficulty in the core curriculum areas often have underlying speech, language and communication needs. In children's early years, poor speech and language skills have been found to be one of the key factors

associated with children's lower general level of development scores at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage at age 5.

The Millennium Cohort Study published in the Save the Children 'Read On, Get On' report (2014) reported that children in their early years with delayed language skills who live in socially deprived areas, are highly likely to experience ongoing language and learning difficulties at later key stages and phases in education if they do not have opportunities which allow their language skills to catch up with their peers.

## CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Continuing professional development has always been a requirement to practice for speech and language therapists. In 2005, all therapists were regulated by the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC). Speech and language therapists now have a duty to follow the standards of conduct, performance and ethics set out by the HCPC. Part of these standards covers responsibilities with regard to maintaining and developing speech and language therapist knowledge and skills:

*'You must keep your knowledge and skills up to date and relevant to your scope of practice through continuing professional development'*

and also their work with colleagues:

*'You must work in partnership with colleagues, sharing your skills, knowledge and experience where appropriate, for the benefit of service users and carers'.*

The HCPC defines CPD for the speech and language therapy profession as 'a range of learning activities through which health professionals maintain and develop throughout their career to ensure that they retain their capacity to practise safely, effectively and legally within their evolving scope of practice'. CPD standards stipulate that speech and language therapists must:

1. *Maintain a continuous, up to-date and accurate record of their CPD activities*
2. *Demonstrate that their CPD activities are a mixture of learning activities relevant to current or future practice*
3. *Seek to ensure that their CPD has contributed to the quality of their practice and service delivery*
4. *Seek to ensure that their CPD benefits the service user*
5. *Upon request present a written profile (which must be their own work and supported by evidence) explaining how they have met the standards for CPD.*

CPD activities cover a wide range including work based learning (e.g. learning by doing, clinical audit, reflective practice, clinical supervision, coaching from others), professional activity (e.g. membership of a special interest group, giving presentations at conferences, organising accredited courses), formal/educational experiences (e.g. attending courses, completing a piece of research, writing articles

and papers, planning or running a course), self-directed learning (e.g. reading journals or articles, reviewing books) or other CPD opportunities such as volunteering, providing other public service duties. Speech and language therapists are required to demonstrate that each of the categories of CPD have been satisfied every year.

Reflecting on their own CPD made Jo and Bibiana examine the CPD experiences that they were providing for others. In both of their previous roles in the NHS, they had delivered formal classroom based training for teachers and early years practitioners, but had often felt that they hadn't always met the learners' needs (especially those who preferred more 'hands on' types of learning experiences). They found that teachers and practitioners often did not appear to apply skills learned from training courses into their day to day teaching.

Both Jo and Bibiana had used video as a means to support parents and professionals to reflect on their interactions with children in order to promote language, social and literacy skills in children's early years and in primary and secondary phases of education. Jo and Bibiana had also both used the Canadian Hanen® parent and early years practitioner programmes. This approach uses a combination of formal classroom learning and video to support learners to transfer knowledge into everyday skills at school or home. They knew that using video during Hanen® programmes, combined with classroom based training was an effective, non-threatening method which often helped adults to reframe their interactions with children, and in doing so, supported children's speech, language and communication development.

## PILOT SCHOOLS

In 2013, two schools approached Jo and Bibiana wanting to develop their speech, language and communication provision. Both had identified this work as part of their school development plan and this was in the context of recent Ofsted inspections. One school was a maintained nursery school; the other was a federation of three schools (two infant schools including nursery and reception classes and a junior school). Both schools were in areas of social deprivation with high numbers of children with delayed language development and also children whose first language was not English. The head teachers wanted to look at a whole school approach which would be understood and utilised by all staff. The changes that they sought needed to be sustainable and not contingent on one member of staff developing all the knowledge and skills. This method had been trialled in the past by the schools and found to be poor value for money if the trained member of staff moved on to better prospects.

Jo and Bibiana began to look at a variety of tools and methods to develop key aspects of the school provision e.g. how the physical learning environment was conducive to communication, the evidence based interventions used by the schools to support children's language development, the observation, assessment and planning systems around speech, language and communication and how the

schools enabled parents to create a home environment conducive to language development. Both head teachers wanted to look at the quality of the interactions between staff and the children, because they knew that Ofsted would assess this method of teaching and learning. Jo and Bibiana decided to look at using video combined with classroom learning to support teachers to develop new pedagogical skills in their day to day working practices.

## VIDEO ENHANCED REFLECTIVE PRACTICE (VERP) AND THE COACHING PROCESS

Jo and Bibiana contacted Rachel Lofthouse at Newcastle University after reading 'Improving coaching: Evolution not revolution' which was a schools guide to coaching teachers as a method of CPD. Initially, Rachel recommended that they attend a two day VERP conference in Newcastle in 2013 in order to find out about the approach and have opportunities to network with practitioners from a variety of professional backgrounds who already used VERP. Rachel then worked with Jo and Bibiana to develop a methodology which would be both evidence based, and would also allow them to develop teacher practice via a blended approach of classroom training combined with learning in their own work environment. This would allow teachers to share challenges and successes in relation to their own children who had speech, language and communication needs (Lofthouse, Flanagan & Wigley, 2016). Our method was informed heavily by VERP involving:

*"...the video recording of real-life situations and then a 'shared review' of the edited clips in one to one or small group meetings with a guider or VIG supervisor...It is a strengths-based and empowerment based approach to developing skills in communication, reflection and critical analysis. It also seeks to actualize professional values in practice."* (Strathie, Strathie and Kennedy, 2011)

Jo and Bibiana used 5 minute clips of video which recorded teacher/child interactions in a real-life situation. The teacher watched the video alone first and made notes, followed by Jo or Bibiana watching alone, then the teacher and speech and language therapist discussed the video together based on each individual's notes and recollections. The teacher/therapist dialogue regularly referred to the video in order to identify 'critical' moments that would anchor the conversation around how the teacher and child had interacted together. The principles of attuned interactions and guidance (Kennedy, Landor & Todd 2011) were followed for example, ensuring that strengths were discussed: active listening/receiving of messages, keeping the discussion light hearted and fun and supporting a positive dialogic discussion which mirrored and used supportive non-verbal communication. The process was repeated two or three times every two to three weeks until three cycles were completed. Action points were recorded by the teacher and these points would be followed up in successive sessions if they wanted to follow that line of enquiry further.

Discussion took place with both head teachers prior to beginning the video process. It was agreed that the school leadership team would create an atmosphere in school

which was conducive for video enhanced reflective practice coaching to take place – for example timetabling, staff cover and encouraging staff to try a new and novel method of CPD. Jo and Bibiana also agreed that the content of discussion would be confidential. The teacher could discuss the session if they chose to with the head teacher, but this would be for the individual to decide. Finally, Jo and Bibiana agreed with the head teacher that if the teacher did discuss their video session with them, the outcome should not be linked to performance management, but rather be used as an opportunity for the teacher to explore barriers to achieving the desired CPD outcome.

## UNDERSTANDING TEACHER PERSPECTIVES AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

Working together with Rachel helped Jo and Bibiana to understand some of the key challenges and barriers for teachers in our education system. Although they had realised that their traditional methods had not gained ‘results’, they had both failed to understand and empathise with the stresses of working in schools in England today. Rachel helped Jo and Bibiana to understand the ‘performative’ system in which teachers work, where children’s attainment is linked to teacher performance and pay, and where time and space for CPD is limited within the school working day due to staffing, cover and resource issues and is often linked to school priorities and part of whole school (not individuals’) in-service development plans. At the time when this piece of work was initiated, there were no national requirements or standards for teacher CPD similar to those within the speech and language therapy profession. Jo and Bibiana were also made aware that the content of a teacher’s lessons had been prescribed by the National Curriculum which creates challenges in terms of being able to use creative pedagogical skills when supporting learning for children with additional needs such as SEN, speech and language difficulties or English as an additional language. This has been written as a case study (Laing and Todd, 2015).

Rachel encouraged Jo and Bibiana to add on to the theoretical bedrock of VERP with additional theories about teacher coaching which would further underpin their approach and make it ‘fit for purpose’ in the education system. Using the work of Eraut (2007), Jo and Bibiana realised that they needed to use methods which would not only encourage teachers to observe themselves and jointly set new courses of action; they also needed to help and empower teachers to develop metacognitive skills which would enable them to apply what they had learned in the videoed sessions to similar but different situations back in the classroom. They also knew that encouraging teachers to listen to pupil views and opinions could also help to shape the interplay between themselves and children with speech and language difficulties (Timperley 2011). Additionally, Rachel raised that Jo and Bibiana needed to consider four domains of teacher professional development:

1. *Personal* domain – teacher knowledge, beliefs and attitudes
2. *Practical* domain – professional experimentation
3. *Consequence* domain – child learning outcomes, teacher control, child motivation
4. *External* domain – sources of support/stimulus/information, eg in-service training, reading publications, conversations with colleagues

(Zwart, 2007).

Rachel hypothesised that by utilising this melting pot of theoretical underpinning, the new coaching method would be able to support teachers to move through a process which initially stimulated thinking, then would begin to promote attitude change and finally experimentation with new and novel practices. This in turn would have an impact on pupils and consequences for practice.

## COMMUNICATION RICH PEDAGOGIES

During Jo and Bibiana's coaching journey with the teaching staff, they realised that using attuned interactions had enabled them to develop a warm, supportive space where they could reflect on teacher interactions with children. However, Jo and Bibiana also began to recognise that they needed to be much clearer about the specific set of pedagogical practices that they wanted to discuss with the teachers. At the beginning of the pilot the conversations were very warm and supportive, but the teachers felt that they didn't understand what Jo and Bibiana were 'getting at'. The conversations also frequently ventured into discussion about general teaching pedagogy which was out of the scope of Jo and Bibiana's professional expertise. Jo and Bibiana realised that they needed to provide teachers with pedagogical techniques which could support and promote adult/child interactions, provide a communication effective physical learning environment and enable teachers to build in language learning opportunities to lesson planning. The Better Communication Research Programme (2012) was a programme of research commissioned by the Labour Government designed to enhance the evidence base and inform delivery of better outcomes for children with speech, language and communication needs. One of the 10 projects in the programme developed a Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (Dockrell, Bakopoulou, Law, Spencer & Lindsay 2012). This tool was devised following a systematic review of the literature which looked at pedagogies that supported speech, language and communication development in the classroom. The tool is suitable for use in children's early years learning spaces and Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms. Jo and Bibiana decided to use the tool and devised training sessions to explain the pedagogical techniques and how they could be applied to children at differing ages and stages of development. The Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool was then trialled during the coaching sessions. Jo and Bibiana also decided to additionally utilise oracy techniques (Howe and Mercer 2007) with the teachers in the junior school, where more age appropriate methods were needed which could facilitate paired and group talking interactions.

Once Jo and Bibiana began to use more specific communication rich pedagogies, the teachers began to report changes to their interactions and how the children responded:

*"I realised I needed to stop answering for children and also to give more thinking time. I questioned the concept of 'pace'. The coaching raised my awareness of the significance of the elements of the communication training in the classroom."*

*“Once I had received coaching, I was able to think about my practice and reflect on my interactions and realised I was a bit directive with the children, and a lot of my activities are where I am talking, and there is not much conversation coming from the children. The language was being led by me. I realised that I needed to give the children more time to talk and start conversations.”*

Jo and Bibiana also realised that they were able to develop a more co-constructive dialogue with the teaching staff. This allowed discussion around evidence based solutions that worked in both professional spheres and the teachers would share their own experience and knowledge of education theory with regard to developing children’s speech, language and communication and wider teaching techniques. Each coaching discussion became a novel and creative neutral space where hypotheses were developed together to meet the specific needs of individual or groups of children. Using attuned interactions was crucial in terms of setting the tone and allowing this process to flourish.

## FEEDBACK FROM PILOT SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS

Throughout the piece of work with the two schools, Rachel carried out Theory of Change interviews with both head teachers. She wanted to ascertain what the heads’ expectations were in terms of outcomes at the outset of the piece of work, and also find out their perceptions at the end in terms of changes to staff, the children and the wider school community. Using Theory of Change helped to develop a more nuanced approach. This was because the piece of work was multi-faceted in terms of the variety of elements covered e.g. the video coaching, staff training and the development of new systems and processes to support speech, language and communication development across the schools.

The head teacher at one of the schools reported that coaching created a ‘community of practice’ and a means to grow and develop the speech and language provision:

*“There has been a definite shift from individual specialist coaching to staff coaching culture. The setting is open plan and I now notice teachers and teaching assistants commenting to each other while they are working with the children, referring to commonly understood concepts which support communication. Because they are more informed, their conversations with parents about SLC are more meaningful.”*

## STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In July 2016, the Department for Education published the standard for teachers’ professional development. The standard state that:

*“Effective teacher professional development is a partnership between:*

- *Head teachers and other members of the leadership team;*



- *Teachers; and*
- *Providers of professional development expertise, training or consultancy.”*

And in order to ensure that this partnership is successful they state:

- *Professional development should have a focus on improving and evaluating pupil outcomes*
- *Professional development should be underpinned by robust evidence and expertise.*
- *Professional development should include collaboration and expert challenge.*
- *Professional development programmes should be sustained over time.*

*And all this is underpinned by, and requires that professional development must be prioritised by school leadership.*

Teachers now have a framework for CPD which can be built on and used to support their development of new teaching practices. The Department for Education are clear that CPD must be prioritised and supported by leaders in school. It can be argued that video enhanced reflective practice via peer to peer coaching from other teachers or specialists such as speech and language therapists can and does provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on practice in real life situations.

## CONCLUSION

Opportunities for Jo and Bibiana to continue video coaching since the piece of work in this article ended have been limited. This is due to the constraints that teachers and head teachers face in their working day and also funding issues for CPD in schools. However, Jo and Bibiana have found similar results in terms of impact for children and teachers in the schools that they have worked with subsequently. Their small scale piece of work suggests that video coaching using communication rich pedagogies could be an effective tool to support teacher CPD and improve outcomes for children with speech, language and communication needs, particularly when it is used in conjunction with a range of CPD experiences and the principles of Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) and VERP are utilised. As speech and language therapists, the process of refining and developing the video coaching method in conjunction with a teacher researcher and with teachers themselves has enabled Jo and Bibiana to fundamentally change the way that they provide CPD opportunities.

Instead of being a transactional process where knowledge is imparted and there is an expectation that the recipient will act, a new shared understanding has emerged which has been mutually beneficial to all. Using the principles of VIG and VERP has allowed this to happen. It is hoped that the recently announced CPD standards will create more opportunities for teachers to develop new practices in conjunction with speech and language therapists, which in turn will support the ever growing numbers of children with speech, language and communication needs in schools. Jo, Bibiana and Rachel propose that using the principles of VIG and VERP alongside video coaching should be a widely available professional learning opportunity for teachers

alongside speech and language therapists. This will ensure that expertise is jointly and equally shared, creating new ways to develop working practices together to meet the diverse needs of children with SLCN.

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**From August 2017 Rachel will be working at Leeds Beckett University.**

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